

21st Feburary 2021 10 am The Importance of Marriage – Imaging God

Service led by Revd. Andrew Attwood, including interview with Karen about God at Work, and Bible readings. Talk by Graham Archer, Intercessions by Karen and Marcus.

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Welcome

[Andrew:] Hi folks,

[Marcus:] Good morning! [Karen:] Good morning! [Graham:] Morning!

[Andrew:] Good to see you. Hi, Graham, good to see you. [Graham:] Good morning.

[Andrew:] Are you all well? [Karen:] Yeah. [Marcus:] Yeah.

[Andrew:] Are you going to get some fresh air later do you think guys?

[Karen:] Yeah, I think so. [Marcus:] Yeah, we'll try. [Karen:] Yeah, we'll try.

[Andrew:] This is good.

[Graham:] I had my jab last week, Andrew.

[Andrew:] Do you know what, Graham? I'm having my jab this afternoon.

[Graham:] Good for you.

[Andrew:] You know? Obviously I've graduated into your age bracket now, Graham.

[Graham:] [laughs] Poor you!

[Andrew:] Yeah, I was just texting Denise, whether I need to go on time or a bit earlier because there's quite a lot of people. It's good news. It's good. You'll be next, you two.

[Karen:] I've had mine.

[Andrew:] You're already done, aren't you, in your profession. Yeah. Anyway, it's lovely to see you and we'll be speaking with Graham and the guys later on. So I'll see you in a bit. Okay? [Karen:] Bye!

Notices

[Andrew:] So just bear with me for a few notices now. If you could grab a cushion. I'm going to do some notices in a moment, but if you could have a cushion to hand, something that you can grab hold of, just as a way of preparing us for worship, a cushion will be needed if you can pick up one.

Just a few pieces of information to pass on:

- There's a youth event that is going to be happening, so for those of you who have young people who are connected into what Michelle Harris is doing with our young people, on the 26th of February, there's going to be a youth event at 7:30pm organised by Tom Millington. And if you're in touch with Michelle she can give you the Zoom link for that. So that's going to be gathering youth from across the area, so that'd be really good to have folks go to that.
- I also wanted to just give a bit of a plug to some fundraising that you might be able to find if you have a newsletter from Denise this week. Rachel Easter and her family are doing some cycling, they're doing a cycling challenge to raise money for the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in

Birmingham. You'll read in the newsletter why Rachel has a particular connection to that hospital, and there's a link to give her some sponsorship for the hospital if you're interested in it. So well done, Rachel and family. We're rooting for you, that'll be really good.

- One final notice, it's just to set the scene for today and the next few weeks, actually. We've just been doing a short series on grace, we're heading now into a series of talks over the next few weeks looking at the subject of marriage. We've been laying some foundations over these last few months. You may recall a series that was focusing on the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And then we did another series focusing on the authority of Scripture. In the light of those two, and more recently looking at God's grace, we're now going to be looking at the subject of marriage. There'll be four talks with a short gap inbetween, and I do hope that you'll be blessed and strengthened by these talks. Graham is going to be setting the scene for us with our first talk today on marriage.

Activity

So, before we sing and join in with the usual videos I wonder if you could grab a cushion. Sometimes we need something tangible to engage with God. So I just wondered if you might want to take up a cushion, and I want you to imagine that the cushion is representing you and your connection to God this morning. So I'm just going to pray and then lead us through something with the cushion in our hands.

Lord Jesus, as we meet today, would You soften our hearts, would you cause us to turn our gaze towards You and to be open to You. Amen.

So maybe with a cushion, if you just want to embrace the cushion, hug the cushion for a moment and maybe that could be, if you like, a gesture to God saying, "Lord, I just want to wrap my arms around You. I want to be close to You." Just have a moment or two, just to feel that sense of wanting to be in connection with God, and just let the cushion be there for you as a reminder that He is close. So help us, Lord, to reach out to You.

And maybe in the quiet, I want you to stay still enough to perhaps imagine God putting His arms around you in response.

Father God, would You wrap Your arms around us this morning. We have been learning, Lord, of Your grace. So would You help us this morning to receive and know Your grace.

Let's stay in that place of closeness to God.

And Father God, we pray that we would be aware of Your arms around us all through our time this morning. Lord, we thank You for Your goodness, we thank You for Your love. Hold us if we feel frail, hold us if we feel weary, hold us, Lord, if we feel unworthy. We put our trust in You again. And we ask, Lord, that as we move into a time of sung worship that we would meet You and we would hear from You. In Jesus' holy name, Amen.

So we're now going to sing.

1st Song: For Who You Are

Verse

Standing here in Your presence
Thinking of the good things You have done,
Waiting here patiently
Just to hear Your still small voice I hear.

Calling, righteous, faithful till the end,
Saviour, healer, redeemer and friend.

Chorus:

I will worship You for who You are, x 3
Jesus.

Repeat verse

Chorus x 2

Bridge:

My soul's secure, Your promise sure,
Your love endures always. } x 3

Chorus x 2

2nd Song: Cornerstone (My Hope is Built on Nothing Less)

1. My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly trust in Jesus' name.

Repeat Verse 1

Chorus:

Christ alone, Cornerstone
Weak made strong, in the Saviour's love
Through the storm
He is Lord, Lord of all

2. When darkness seems to hide His face
I rest on His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.

Chorus x 2

Interview with Karen: God at Work

[Andrew:] So hi, Karen.

[Karen:] Hi.

[Andrew:] Good to see you. Thank you for being here to answer some questions.

First question. Where do you think you would be on a Monday, what do you think you'd be doing this time tomorrow, maybe 10am?

[Karen:] Actually, with a lady who's had a spinal cord injury. So that's where I'll be, face-to-face, hands on, in PPE.

[Andrew:] In PPE no doubt. Yeah!

[Andrew:] So given that that's your line of work, in what ways do you sense God's presence and God's purpose in your work?

[Karen:] Well I was trying to sum it up, I could sense lots of ways. And I thought, I think the short answer is, in everything. God's purpose and presence in everything I do. I became a Christian whilst training to be a physio. And I think, I think God just takes me as a person as who I am, as a vessel, and He just fills me, and He uses me, but as I am, as a person for what I need to do. And I think that's the quick answer, and to bring, I sense His purpose in bringing physical recovery, but also emotional recovery as well, because people that I see have had really catastrophic accidents, and, you know, it's not an easy thing to do for them. So I walk on a journey with them. It might be a couple of hours, might be couple of weeks, might be years. And it's a very personal journey. So it's a real privilege to be with them. So God is in everything I do actually, I think that's the long and the short of it. I pray for them. I don't pray long and sophisticated prayers, I pray "God use me," simple prayers. And if I get stuck, I might say, "God, I'm stuck" (not during the session - hopefully I don't get stuck during the session). If I think we're getting stuck over something I will pray beforehand because sometimes discernment is needed. I don't know what's going on, but God does.

[Andrew:] That's really good, that's really interesting. So in the light of the future of your work and the ongoing nature of it, what would you say are your hopes for yourself and God's activity over, say, the next few months in your working context?

[Karen:] I think it's just to get through it actually. It's a really difficult time. And it's difficult because the people that I see are already struggling. And they've been brilliant, but just to get through these tough times that were already restricted but they've been restricted further and it's more difficult for them to access treatment. So, providing encouragement and providing support and prayer is a really important thing. And so the next few months I think it's just getting people through until we return to a bit of normality – and using a lot of humour!

[Andrew:] Amen.

Humour is good. Okay, I think that's it, really, in terms of getting through.

[Andrew:] Well, look, Karen, thank you so much. And God bless you in this very important work. Thank you for answering my questions.

[Karen:] Okay, thank you.

[Andrew:] Bye now.

[Karen:] Thank you.

[Andrew:] That was a pre-recorded interview I did with Karen, a while back. And just to give us another flavour, another window into what people are doing in their work context and how they see faith fitting into all of that. So yes, God bless you, Karen in what you're doing as a physio.

1st Reading: Genesis 1:26-31 [NIVUK 1984]

26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

27 So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

29 Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day.

2nd Reading: Galatians 3:23-29 [NIVUK 1984]

23 Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. 24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

25 Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Talk: The Importance of Marriage – Imaging God

[Andrew:] So perhaps if Graham can join us now I'll just pray briefly for Graham, and I'll hand over to him. Hi Graham, let me just pray for you now.

[Graham:] Thanks.

[Andrew:]

Lord Jesus, thank You for Graham, and thank You for the preparation he has done for today's talk. I pray that we would have our ears wide open to hear what he is saying, and that You would help us to discern what You are saying through him. So bless him and strengthen him as he speaks, in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Graham Archer:]

Amen. Well good morning everybody! I realised in my notes in this talk, I started by saying, "It's nice to see you," but actually I can't, so I look forward to the day when we're in the same space and can actually see each other, and maybe be restored a bit in our connections with each other, because that's, that's what the Gospel is about, the relational thing.

Thank you to Andrew for giving me the opportunity to launch this series on marriage. And we always come to that topic with filters that are shaded by our own experience. So I ought to start by acknowledging my own filter, before perhaps recognising some of the others that might be present in this virtual room at the same time. I'm happily married to Diana, we've been married for over 40 years now. Like most people, there's been light and dark shade throughout the years, but generally speaking, marriage has been good to us, and we're glad to be together, and we're glad that God brought us together, and we're glad that God has forced us through difficult times too. So, that means I come to the subject of marriage feeling very positive, very positive.

But I've been a preacher now for over 40 years, and although I'm happy to preach on the topic, it's never easy, because actually our different filters are impacted by the experiences that we have. I think I've now taken between 600 and 700 weddings throughout my ministry, and on each occasion, I think increasingly through the years, I've become more aware of the other filters that might be on people's eyes. Let me just mention some, because they may relate to you as you come to this topic. In an average wedding I would expect that any of the following might be present.

- There might be someone there who longs to find a perfect partner, and is beginning to wonder if it's too late, and actually comes to it with a certain amount of sadness.
- And in the average wedding, I imagine that there's usually someone there who is attracted to the same sex, and is bracing themselves for a preacher in which another insensitive comment might be said for them.
- I imagine that there might be people in a wedding service who are married but are not in a good place with each other, desperately hoping the preacher won't imply that everything about marriages is fun and easy.
- I think increasingly over recent years, I've been aware of those who struggle to be able to equate their view of themselves with what appears to be a picture of kind-of extreme binary sexual identity, gender identity, the girl being very girly and the boy being very masculine in a wedding service.
- Also in in the average wedding there will be someone who has lost their soulmate, and every wedding still brings them to tears and a painful reminder of all that they have lost.

So, the reason I say this is that none of us come to any discussion about this kind of topic without having our own experiences that affect the filters that are upon our eyes.

But as we come to any topic, the place always for us to start is with the Scriptures and what God has got to say to us. And so, Andrew's asked me to say a little bit about the two opening chapters of Genesis, which I'm very happy to do and I want to pick up three themes that I think are strong in those chapters. Let me just share my screen for a while. I won't do this for the whole time, but there's just a few slides we might look at together.

The first theme I want to mention in Genesis 1 is what scholars call the *imago dei*. The creation narrative is foundation in so many aspects to God's story, and not least in the way that it helps us to understand our humanity. One of the foundational theological phrases in what's called the doctrine of humanity is this phrase *imago dei*. If you put something in Latin, it

always sounds more academic and convincing, but it's simply the notion that human beings are made in the image of God. And because we're made in God's image we're able to reflect both His character and His priorities, and the rest of the big story of the Scriptures illustrates all the way through that God keeps trying to call us back to this high calling of being people who know and reflect the character and the grace of God. So, if you look at the prophets that were calling us back to God, if you look at John the Baptist that was inviting us back to God, if you look at Jesus' ministry itself and there in Colossians 3 I've quoted something as well, so God says in the beginning,

... "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27 So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

So this thing about the image of God says that foundational to our humanity is this capacity to reflect God and partner with Him in the things that He is seeking to do. It makes clear that our identity isn't all about being married. Whether we're married or we're single, the image of God is in us, whoever we are. It's a creation ordinance, the mark of God is upon our lives. Paul was not married, but he had fullness of life, and he understood that the image of God was the high calling he was called back to. Let me just give you a quotation from somebody who knows more about it than me¹.

The term *imago dei* (the image of God) refers most fundamentally to two things: first, God's own self-actualization through humankind (He is making Himself visible in humanity); and second, God's care for humankind. To say that humans are in the image of God is to recognize the special qualities of human nature which allow God to be made manifest in humans. In other words, for humans to have the conscious recognition of their being in the image of God means that they are the creature through whom God's plans and purposes can be known and actualized; humans, in this way, can be seen as co-creators with God.

Genesis 1 and the imago dei

- **26** Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'
- **27** So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (**Genesis 1:26-27**)
- And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. (**Colossians 3:10**)



1 <https://www.pbs.org/faithandreason/theogloss/imago-body.html>

What an amazing thing to think! For me, my love of science, it comes from our ability to discover the world that God has made. And I think science is God's way of helping us to celebrate what He's done. Let me give you a couple of quotes from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who said,

After 15 billion years, the universe can finally reflect upon itself through the presence of humanity.

I love this one: he says,

The history of the living world can be summarised as the elaboration of ever-more perfect eyes within a cosmos, in which there's always something more to be seen.

We're made to see God in His creation, and we are made to be part of the actualization of who He is, through our humanity. That to me is foundation to the story of Genesis 1 and Genesis chapter 2, but also we notice that there is a clear statement that God made human beings. It's not that man reflects the character of God, but that male and female are both made in His image. Some would say that it's the participation, the working together of men and women that actually creates the best opportunity for the fullness of the life of God to be expressed.

Now for many years that simple phrase, "male and female He created them" was blatantly self-evident. My first career was in biochemistry and I was at university in the early days really of the study of genetics. And we were taught in those days that there were a very, very small number of people who genetically were hard to define as male or female, but for the majority of us, the vast majority of us, that genetics defines which of those we were. That was expressed in our biological shape and features. It was also expressed in our biochemistry, different balances of the endocrine system, in the chemicals that slop around men, the chemicals that slop around women, affecting a whole range of both physiological and psychological expressions of who we are. And so that was a fairly clear kind of thing. And maleness and femaleness that is found together in the story of God's creativity, it is key because of the task, one of the tasks that is given to humanity. And you'll know that as you go on in that reading it says, as we read this morning,

27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it..."

So part of the maleness and femaleness, the complementarity, is coming together for the purpose for which we are created, to multiply and subdue the earth. The complimentary physiology is the way by which new life is formed. Now, however we take the original story of Adam and Eve to be, it is foundational from the story that continues from it. None of us exists, except for what was established there right at the origin of the species, i.e. the complementarity between male and female, donor DNA from a man planted in the womb of a woman: fruitfulness is dependent upon it, and though we have found a few workarounds in the natural process, nothing fundamentally has changed, and of course cloning - I won't get distracted - is a very different kind of process.

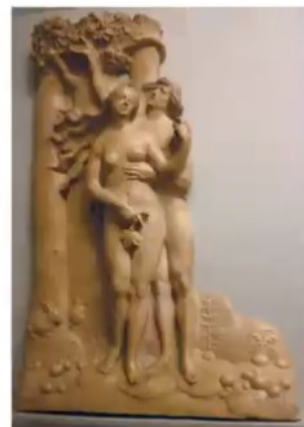
So there's the complementarity of gender. And then the following chapter, chapter 2, illustrates more fully how the coming together of two in a committed relationship is the context in which children are not just born but are nurtured. Reassuringly Adam and Eve didn't seem to be much better at it than most of us are today. Here's another image that I'll offer.² This image is the Hering sculpture in the Victoria and Albert Museum which is from 1520.

2 on next page

If chapter 1 is written around the story of the earth and its development, and humankind as the pinnacle of God's creativity, reflecting the image of God, chapter 2 is grappling with the glory of relationships that are made possible by humanity. Something about the image of God in human beings enabled us not to be alone, but

Genesis 2

- **18** The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'
- But for Adam no suitable helper was found.
- **22** Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.
- 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman", for she was taken out of man.'
- **24** That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.
- **25** Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.



to find connectedness and the richness of life in the same way as the Father and the Son and the Spirit live in community, so human beings were designed in order to live in community too. The committed complimentary safe and intimate model of Adam and Eve are foundational to the plan of 'multiply and filling the earth'.

18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

... But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ...

22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

... "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man."

24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

25 Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

So there's something about intimacy without shame, something about complementarity, something about connectedness.

Now, the picture of a man and a woman united in fruitful intimacy, you might say, "Well, that particular image is from donkeys' years ago, Graham, and the stories of it are difficult to understand - I can't make sense of all that surgery and ribs and all that business. Surely it's not relevant to today, it's just from years and years ago." But of course when we look at the New Testament, we see that in Jesus' words, when He was reflecting the Pharisees on what reasons for divorce might be allowed, Jesus Himself quotes these verses from Genesis chapter 1 and says³,

4 He answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, **5** and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? **6** So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

And in the early church, as I said before, we think He was probably single, He still quoted that same verse⁴, as in His discussions with the Pharisees too.

31 "For this reason" (He says, quoting Genesis 1) "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

³ [RSV]

⁴ In Ephesians 5:31 [RSV]

So there's a consistency throughout the story. And this is reflected in the marriage service. As I said I think I've taken between 600 and 700 weddings over the years - I don't need to be reminded of the words, they're familiar, they're sort of ingrained in my head, I could do it without thinking.

The Bible teaches us (it says in the introduction) that marriage is a gift of God in creation,

A gift - it's not the only gift, there are lots of gifts of God in creation - but it's one of the gifts of God in creation,

and one of the means of his grace, a holy mystery in which man and woman become one flesh.

And it says,

It is God's purpose that, as husband and wife give themselves to each other in love throughout their lives, they shall be united in that love as Christ is united with his church.

So, again, that thing about being made in the image of God, reflecting the character of God, the complementarity of genders and so on, is enshrined in the marriage service. And finally,

I find this quite moving, these three paragraphs, it talks about the three qualities of actually the marriage relationship, it talks about firstly companionship and connectedness, friendship, good marriages are built on friendship. Secondly, it talks

Marriage is given, that husband and wife may comfort and help each other, living faithfully together in need and in plenty, in sorrow and in joy.

It is given, that with delight and tenderness they may know each other in love, and, through the joy of their intimacy, may strengthen the union of their hearts and lives.

It is given as the foundation of family life in which children may be born and nurtured in accordance with God's will, to his praise and glory.

about intimacy. And then it talks about the foundation of family life in which children may be born and nurtured. There's a consistency with the marriage service to the way that the New Testament handles Genesis chapter 1 and 2, and what's put in Genesis 1 and 2, in terms of our ability to reflect the character and the image of God, our calling to be connected to one another, and wonderful forms of that connectedness, the marriage between husband and wife that allows us to be fruitful, to fill the earth, and subdue it.

Now, you might say, "Graham, you've offered a very linear picture of how it is, from Genesis through to the present day." And that's absolutely true. But we're currently engaged in something nationally called 'living in love and faith'.



LIVING
IN LOVE
& FAITH

It's a discussion about marriage that's taking place up and down the country, as we try and grapple with the fact that a number of us come to this discussion with a whole lot of other filters and a whole lot of priorities and expectations. There are two big questions that are being considered:

- one is, "Can we really say that human beings are just binary in an era when there are ever new definitions of gender that are being defined or self-defined? Is 'binary' a concept that we can no longer quite engage with or buy into?"
- And the second big question that we're facing as a church and society is, "Can we really say that marriage is only a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman, especially now that our legal framework for the nation allows for something else, a committed relationship between two people of the same sex?"

In this discussion about these new strands of thinking, these new questions that have emerged, there are two terms that are often used to describe our responses. They're not perfect terms, terms are never perfect, but

- you will sometimes hear people described or describing themselves as 'orthodox' on the issue of human sexual sexuality, by which a person will mean, "That which I see as the biblical origins I still embrace as being God's normative for human beings."
- And then you will also hear the term 'revisionist': people who might say, "Well, you know what? The Bible talks about this as the kind of normal situation, but that was years ago, and it's time that we revised our understanding of what it means to be in a marriage covenant in the light of what we've been discovering about gender, about attraction, and so on and so forth."

And so that's the kind of parameters within which the discussion is taking place.

So let me just conclude with a couple of challenges to us wherever we sit in that spectrum, and one encouragement that comes from the Archbishop.

- Firstly, for those of us who come to the debate and willingly embrace what you might call a more orthodox perspective on these issues, there are theological challenges and there are pastoral challenges.
 - The theological challenge is thinking through what we hold, treasure and believe in the light of new thinking, because it's not impossible for the church sometimes to think that its understanding of how things are ('The world is flat') is based on a theological perspective, which is not a complete perspective. So we need to think through theologically what we believe also in the light of new discoveries and new thinking about these issues.
 - And for those of us who hold an orthodox position on this stuff, we need to make sure that we hold it in such a way that the unintended consequence of what we believe is that within our community those who see things in a different way don't feel that they have no access to us as a community or no access particularly to the grace that we are seeking to express of the Good News of Jesus Christ. It's the pastoral challenge if you like.
- And for those of us that hold more of a kind of revisionist view that want to say we want to move from what used to be, we want something completely different,
 - There's a theological challenge there as to what we do with the Biblical texts that seem to speak about the binary nature of humanity, and the connectedness across that as being the sort of expected norm within the Biblical trend.
 - And of course pastorally there is also the thought that's how I express a revisionist view recognising that it isn't the only view that exists within the body of Christ, and God is calling us to still be in community with one another, in the light of different perspectives.

These are not easy things. If they were easy things to consider they would they would have happened in a moment. And two things have happened within the Church of England:

- Two years ago, something called the '6 pastoral principles' were developed, which was an attempt to say, "How do we have good conversations about things we might disagree with?"
- And the second thing is the 'living in love and faith' initiative, which is, "How do we give expression to the wide range of differing theological perspectives that are held and enable ourselves to have the best conversation about marriage going into the future?"

The phrase that I picked up from Justin Welby was that he asked that we might have the conversation with the same grace and love that has been extended to us in Christ.

So there's our starting position, there'll be three or four more talks that come through this series, and I ask you to pray for Andrew, and pray for all

Christian leaders, as they seek to navigate their way through this important topic.

Let's pray together, shall we?

Father, we recognise that these pastoral issues that we come to, and we recognise, Father, that our own experiences impact the way that we think, and often cause us to feel the pain that comes from all sorts of things in our lives, where we wish that things might be different.

So we pray, Father, that as You seem to establish marriage as a good thing, there right at the beginning of time, that was underlined by Jesus, though not embraced by Him, we pray that You would help us to have this conversation in a way that leads us ever closer to Your heart and Your mind, that we may best reflect the image of God in the way that we live and the things that we say, in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Andrew:] Amen.

Prayerful Reflection

Thank you, Graham, thank you ever so much for that. Let's just continue briefly in a moment of prayer.

Holy Spirit, would you give us a moment of quiet now, so that we can be still and we can reflect on what we've heard. Let's just have a minute of quiet.

Father in the quiet, we receive from You again the text and the themes that have been presented to us again, in Genesis and reaffirmed by Jesus and Paul. We thank You Lord, that You have made us in Your image. We thank You, Lord, for the complementarity that You have made in male and female. We thank You, Lord, for the richness of relationship and community that can be found in marriage, we thank You for these things.

We thank You Lord, that even though it isn't the only gift, it is a gift from You, and we celebrate it as a gift. And Father, as we explore this subject, we remember that the picture of marriage given is a picture of Christ and the Church. Lord, as we work our way through the various complicated nuances of conversation that are happening at this time, strengthen us in our understanding and give us hearts that can relate well one to another, as we explore these things. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Graham:] Amen.

Intercessions

[Andrew:] Okay, I'm going to hand over now to Karen and Marcus who will lead us in our prayers. Thank you, Graham.

[Graham A:] Thanks.

[Marcus:] Lord God, we do give You thanks and praise today that You are the source of life. And You're the source of light as well, and for the amazing natural world that we see around us. Lord God, we do thank You for each individual, and that You meant for us to be in relationship with You and also with one another.

[Karen:] Yes, Lord, we know that marriages come in all shapes and sizes, and, Lord, we want to thank You for strong and healthy and thriving marriages, where You are at the heart of the relationship, where marriage is a blessing to families and to church and to community. And, Lord, we ask that You may protect those marriages, help them to continue to thrive and

grow. Lord, we lift marriages to You that are strained, and are going through difficult times, where there is adversity, and we ask for Your help, Your wisdom, Your strength and Your comfort in the midst of that adversity.

And Lord, we raise to You those who would like to be married or those who are no longer married or those who are called to be single. Lord, we ask for Your generous and abundant love, as individuals rely and trust in You. And wherever we find ourselves today, most of all we ask that You would help us to stay close to You, Jesus, as we embark on this marriage theme. We ask that we may grow in faith and we may honour and reflect You, Jesus, in all of our relationships.

[Marcus:] Lord God, we also just continue to pray about the coronavirus situation, and do give You thanks for the success of the vaccine rollout in this country, and sometimes elsewhere. We just pray particularly today for our leaders of the country, and for Boris Johnson, as they decide about maybe easing this lockdown period, and the possibility of schools returning, maybe even in March. Lord God, we just pray for their decision-making and for wisdom at this time. And we pray for world leaders as well, we pray for their wisdom, and for compassion as well, in supporting vaccination in developing countries. We just bring them before You too.

We pray for others as well today, we pray for those that are known to us, perhaps that may be unwell, or that are facing particular difficulties, and we just bring them up before You now, and pray for Your blessing on them. We pray for particularly Your comfort and Your presence in their lives.

And we pray for ourselves. Lord, help us to trust You during the time of uncertainty. Help us to trust You day by day, over the coming weeks and months. We pray also that we would be able to take hold of Your promises to us from Your Word. Thank You for the verse that says⁵,

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Amen.

Blessing

Amen. Thank you guys. So we're going to be concluding our service in a short moment. But I just wanted to just encourage you, as we explore this subject of marriage together, do make a point of talking with other Christians. Talk to each other, explore how you think and feel about this and, you know, do return to what Scripture says: this is a key partner in our conversation. We've talked about the authority of Scripture recently. Where does this sit in this ongoing conversation, given that society is saying things that are new to the human story? So let me just pray now for God's blessing on us and then we will have our final song. Let's pray.

Father, we receive again the affirmation that we are made in Your image. Lord, for all of us, and for all those who have been watching at this time, would You bless us in our identity as image-bearers. Lord, would you bless us as male and female, would You bless us whether we are confident or not in ourselves, would You bless us so that we might truly reflect you, and may the blessing of Jesus rest on all our committed relationships, may the blessing of Jesus rest on all those that we are close to, and committed to. And may we in unity reflect Jesus out into the wider world. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Thank you for listening. We'll finish with our final song now.

3rd Song: Light of the World (Here I am to Worship)

1. Light of the world,
You stepped down into darkness
Opened my eyes, let me see
Beauty that made this heart adore You
Hope of a life spent with You

Chorus:

Here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that You're my God.
You're altogether lovely,
All together worthy,
All together wonderful to me.

2. King of all days,
Oh so highly exalted,
Glorious in heaven above.
Humbly You came to the earth You created,
All for love's sake became poor.

Chorus

Bridge:

I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.
I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.

Repeat Bridge

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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